

COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

New tool teaches PCs shorthand

A few years ago, a \$195 program for personal computers appeared that did something quite amazing: It converted preset abbreviations into full words or sentences as the abbreviations were typed.

The program, called PRD+, short for productivity plus, came with many preset abbreviations — asap for as soon as possible, abt for about, aft for after, agn for again — and a slew of handy abbreviations for the days of the week, months of the year, cities and states. But the best part was that you could add your own abbreviations to match your business needs.

But as good as it was, the program didn't have many buyers. Maybe it was the high price, which recently was dropped to \$68. Or perhaps the program was confused

with "macro" programs that also permit strings of characters to be set up for easy retrieval. But macro programs typically require two keys to be struck at the same time, like Ctrl S or Alt A, in order to call up a predefined string of characters.

The unique thing about PRD+ was that it used the space after the abbreviation to recognize when to replace the characters.

The advantage of PRD+ was that touch typists could zip along entering strings of abbreviations or peppering their text with abbreviations without slowing down.

Now, Beacon Software International of Boston, a competitor of PRD+, has thrown its hat in the ring, added more features to the basic idea, made it even easier to use and offered the program for a

lower price. Perhaps now the concept will have a second chance.

The new program, called "jot!," costs \$49.95 plus \$3 for shipping and handling when ordered directly from the publisher.

Here are the three main ways that jot! differs from PRD+:

✓ Blocks of text can be taken from the screen directly, without retyping. Let's say you want to define a new abbreviation for a long paragraph of an existing letter. With PRD+, you'd have to retype the whole paragraph in order to define it. With jot!, you'd simply mark it on the screen without retyping.

✓ Longer blocks of text can be defined with jot!. Up to 4,000 characters can be included in a single definition. PRD+'s limit is 256 characters.

✓ Definitions are easier to set up. jot! makes it easier to see what definitions already are in use, and add new ones. By just pressing the

control key twice, a window appears with all the choices.

On the down side, it's much too easy to lose definitions after you've set them up.

But the big question is whether people will regularly use jot! and rely on it for their daily work. This will depend on each person's needs and work style.

In my case, even after setting it up, entering some abbreviations and trying to use them, I found myself forgetting and typing the words instead.

The bottom line: The longer and more complicated the definitions you plan to set up, the more likely it will be used, and the more sense it makes to buy the program.

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